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President: Mr. Aliyev (Vice-President) ..... (Azerbaijan)

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In the absence of Ms. Rasi (Finland), Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system (*continued*)

High-level panel discussion on "Working together to promote integrated rural development in developing countries, particularly the least developed countries"

1. **The President** said that during its present session the Council had heard a great deal about positive signs of economic growth in many least developed countries. Although that was encouraging for the development community, too often such improvements did not reach those living in rural areas. Fortunately, there was a growing awareness of the need to address rural development, and a number of major steps had already been taken in that direction. Commitments made at the World Food Summit, at the Monterrey and Johannesburg Conferences, and in the Brussels Action Plan showed that the political will existed. The solutions to the challenges of rural development lay in collaboration within and among Governments, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector.

2. **Mr. Ratolojanahary** (Madagascar), Vice-Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, said that over 80 per cent of Madagascar's population lived in rural areas and were dependent on agriculture, livestock and fishing. A large majority of the rural population lived below the poverty line. Madagascar was determined to introduce democratic reforms and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, notably by cutting poverty in half by 2015. The Government was also committed to the creation of fruitful partnerships, and had therefore welcomed the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Council in July 2003, encouraging alliances and partnerships among all stakeholders for the advancement of rural development. Madagascar had been designated as the pilot country for the United Nations Public-Private Alliance for Rural Development, which had been born of the Declaration. The aim of the Alliance was to identify, highlight and promote replication of successful business policies and practices that were profitable and that promoted the social and economic advancement of poor people in rural areas. It had attracted a great deal of support from leading politicians and businessmen.

3. A sister organization called Alliance-Madagascar had been set up as a public-interest, non-profit organization, with a general assembly headed by the Prime Minister and involving participants from the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations and financial and technical support communities. All members of the management committee were Madagascan nationals, with the exception of the United Nations resident coordinator. Actions already undertaken or planned under the Alliance included promoting and facilitating bankable projects, implementing a market-driven master plan for rural development, expanding rural credit, promoting small grants, assisting in the marketing of value-added products in the United States and elsewhere, and facilitating local and international investments.

4. The Council would play a key role in preparations for the high-level plenary meeting of the United Nations Public-Private Alliance's 2005 general assembly, and might wish to highlight the critical role played by rural development in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. He urged the Council to adopt a resolution recognizing the results achieved by the Alliance over the past year and increasing the resources available to it.

5. **Mr. Malloch Brown** (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said that no country had ever achieved sustained development by building a modern sector to its economy without first bringing its agricultural sector into line. An efficient agriculture sector freed labour to build a modern industrial and services sector. Thus, the theme before the Council concerned more than simply easing rural poverty and using resources efficiently. The world's poor were heavily concentrated in rural sectors, as were half the world's hungry people. In general, the development community was not doing a good job, and the rural sector had been neglected. Over the past 20 years, official development assistance (ODA) to agriculture had been halved, in real terms. Despite the World Bank's leadership, most of the world's agricultural extension schemes were underfunded and no longer sustainable. Within the context of developing strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, the hunger task force of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had concluded that solving the problems of the rural sector depended on the political

will to sustain support, both in donor circles and in developing countries. The task force had also identified the following key objectives: improving soil fertility, especially in Africa; making rural markets work for the poor, by drawing farmers into the cash economy and allowing them to retain a much higher portion of the final price of the agricultural product; improving small-scale water management; improving the supply of improved seeds; and restoring investment in agriculture overall, most notably in agricultural extension.

6. **Mr. Harcharik** (Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) recalled that in 2003 the Council had undertaken an in-depth discussion of rural development at its high-level segment and agreed that it should be an integral part of national and international development policies. Pooling efforts to eradicate rural poverty was fundamental for a number of reasons. First, Member States' Governments insisted on partnerships, requiring that the United Nations system work effectively and reduce inter-agency competition and overlapping of responsibilities. Collaboration also made good business sense, and since rural poverty was multidimensional, and it required a holistic, multisectoral approach. Furthermore, the trend towards greater regional cooperation and integration also called for increased collaboration. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was trying to cooperate with a wide range of partners, from the global to the community level. One example of that cooperation was the International Alliance Against Hunger, involving FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) and a number of non-governmental organizations. The aim of the Alliance was to mobilize the political will and resources needed to ensure realization of the World Food Summit goal, and Millennium Development target, of halving the number of undernourished people by 2015. The level of cooperation among the Rome-based United Nations agencies was better than ever. Another example of their collaboration was FAO facilitation of South-South cooperation, with a view to enhancing solidarity among developing countries by providing cost-effective expertise and opportunities for long-term interaction at the field level. The rural areas of the developing world, particularly those of the least developed countries, were the primary setting for extreme poverty and hunger in the modern world. Eradicating those two major impediments to development was a daunting, but not insurmountable task.

7. **Ms. Weill-Halle** (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) said that, in its timely choice of the topic of rural development, the Council had recognized the critical role of rural poverty reduction and rural development in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and added its voice to an important policy debate. A common understanding seemed to be developing on the policies and operational activities required to reduce poverty and hunger by 2015. Many countries and institutions had started to adjust their policies and programmatic orientation in recognition of the 75 per cent of the world's poor who lived in rural areas, giving new priority to the role of agriculture and rural development in their poverty reduction efforts. At their most recent summit, the Group of Eight industrialized countries had adopted a famine action plan for Africa, with new initiatives to raise agricultural productivity and promote rural development. In Africa, more than 200 million people were threatened by famine and food insecurity, and almost 50 per cent of Africans lived in extreme poverty. In response, the July 2003 meeting of the African Union had pledged to allocate 10 per cent of members' national budgets to increased agricultural production and had made agricultural and rural development priorities for action in the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). International financial institutions had likewise adjusted their rural development policy, with the World Bank increasing its lending for the purpose by almost 50 per cent in 2003 and the Inter-American Development Bank expanding its support for rural poverty reduction. Most recently, the community of foundations and other philanthropic institutions had at a meeting in 2004 decided to strengthen their engagement in rural development.

8. Since its founding, IFAF had financed almost 700 projects and programmes for rural poverty reduction and rural development in 115 countries and Territories, whose people were among the most vulnerable and powerless. However, collaboration among all relevant development partners was critical in such an immense task; and the Fund had a tradition of pursuing partnerships and developing mechanisms of cooperation. It had long worked together with the two other Rome-based agencies — FAO and WFP — but

equally critical was its collaboration with non-governmental organizations — 80 per cent of them from the South — and rural people's organizations at the local, national and global level. The primary focus at the field level was local institution-building and empowerment of the poor through community development, natural resources access and management and the creation of social and economic infrastructure.

9. The private sector in rural areas had to be developed and encouraged to create more jobs and income, and crucial market access had to be brought to rural areas. Recently, there had been many welcome new policies developed by Governments — Madagascar in particular was to be commended — and by bilateral and multilateral development partners; all such commitments needed to be translated into adequately funded action. As part of the follow-up to the Millennium Summit, the Council's progress report on the implementation of its own 2003 Ministerial Declaration could be one of the ways in which it asserted its role as the key United Nations organ for economic and social policy, and it might also wish to establish a mechanism to monitor critical issues not on its regular agenda.

10. **Mr. Jury** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the Millennium Development Goals were achievable and that, while their achievement depended more on action by individual Governments, the international community's integrated efforts could also be decisive. The Council had called for policy coherence and the three Rome-based United Nations agencies, although their mandates differed, were well on the way to accomplishing that. They had joined forces to promote rural development with a focus on the most vulnerable. Over 50 per cent of WFP operational expenditures in 2003 had been allocated to the least developed countries and had been primarily used in direct assistance to the poor, especially through food-based safety net activities.

11. At the international level, WFP was actively involved in both the United Nations System Network on Rural Development and Food Security and the FAO-sponsored international alliance against hunger. At the regional level, it was working principally to support NEPAD, especially in two areas identified as urgent by NEPAD itself: school feeding and the establishment of food reserve systems for emergency response. At the country level, working with other United Nations agencies and with donor institutions and governments, WFP used the safety net focus to link a number of activities into integrated rural development. School feeding, with its critical input into both long-term human and national economic development, was being combined with nutrition and health education, school garden projects, water and sanitation projects, environmental improvements, capacity-building activities and HIV/AIDS prevention. Given the devastating impact of that disease, WFP had established an HIV/AIDS unit at headquarters and had HIV/AIDS-related interventions in 41 countries, including 22 of the 25 countries hardest hit.

12. Food and nutrition programmes, so vital in the development of marginalized rural areas where the majority of the poor lived, were the first line of defence in the battle against disease and mortality. WFP nutrition programmes were paying more attention to the underlying cause of malnutrition and sought to build links with longer-term rural development activities. Currently, 20 per cent of development funds and 11 per cent of emergency resources were allocated to mother and child health and nutrition in over 28 countries, and those percentages were expected to rise in the ongoing WFP strategic plan.

13. WFP also supported food-for-work projects that simultaneously helped households and contributed to a region's long-term development. Such programmes could prevent the rural poor from having to sacrifice their assets or send their children to work, and the role of food aid in preventing the loss of assets was at least as important as its role in saving lives directly.

14. **Mr. Davidse** (Observer for the Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, whose members gave priority to rural development in their development cooperation, welcomed the recommendation that the United Nations system should design a coherent capacity-building programme for rural development. Since, however, the scope of such a programme could be limitless, the European Union requested the United Nations to undertake a thorough assessment of existing activities and remaining needs in that area, under the guidance of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).

15. Rural development should be pursued through the kind of integrated approach advocated in the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Council at its high-level segment in 2003. The United Nations

system should work closely with the developing countries to achieve such an integrated approach, making sure to involve all stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. Collaboration at the country level should be within the United Nations development assistance framework and should also be aligned to the poverty reduction strategies of the developing countries, with harmonized and simplified procedures and with country ownership. It would be useful to study the agencies' experience in developing the joint instruments with particular countries.

16. The United Nations system should, of course, continue to coordinate its implementation of the outcomes of the major conferences in the field of international trade, financing for development and increased, secure and sustainable development. The European Union was pleased that the Council was looking ahead to 2005, when it would have to assume its role in reviewing the outcome of the Millennium Declaration, including progress on the Goals, and in the integrated follow-up to summits and conferences.

17. **Mr. Diarra** (Observer for Mali), commending Madagascar for its promising initiative, expressed the hope that the Alliance would attract further financing and be expanded to other countries.

18. The performance of the agencies participating in the panel was a source of satisfaction. Rural development was the basis for food security, which itself was the basis for sustainable development. It was often argued that added value was more important in an economy than the primary sector, but the remarks just heard at the meeting had been reassuring. At its Bamako meeting in late May 2004, over which Mali had presided, the Human Security Network had adopted a Declaration on Food Security, which would be Mali's contribution to the discussions on rural development.

19. **Mr. Bellot** (France) observed that the developed countries must consider the national strategies of the developing countries in providing support. Aware of the priority of rural development, the Group of Eight industrialized countries had been working to reverse the decline in ODA for agriculture, France and the United States had convened a G-8 Ministerial Meeting to that effect and France was working with Brazil, Chile and Spain in an anti-hunger programme. France was pleased that the Rome-based agencies were taking a coordinated approach and seeking consistency in their operational activities.

20. **Mr. Rysiński** (Poland) asked the FAO representative, with regard to South-South cooperation and the development of small-scale farming, whether the examples he had given realistically represented the place of small-scale farming in the mainstream of agricultural change and whether there was indeed a future for it. He wondered what could be done to level the playing field for small-scale farmers and help them face their competition and benefit from an open-market economy.

21. **Mr. Harcharik** (Deputy Director General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) said that small-scale farming must have a future, since 75 per cent of the world's people were rural poor, and a way had to be found to help small-scale farmers raise their productivity and more effectively market their products. The South-South programme was bringing experts from the advanced developing countries to assist less developed countries. FAO had a special programme on food security that aimed to enhance productivity, diversify small-scale farms, improve the use of water, and apply activities successful in pilot projects more broadly in other countries. Success simply in those objectives would make the future more promising.

22. **Mr. Siregar** (Indonesia) said that his Government had focused its rural development efforts on microenterprise. He would like to know how international assistance could provide support for rural governance, especially in countries which were attempting to decentralize.

23. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that further clarification was needed on issues related to desertification and to the rural digital divide, as most of the rural poor had no access to modern information technology.

24. **Mr. Ratolojanahary** (Madagascar) said that Alliance-Madagascar was his country's most important tool to achieve rural development. The main objective set in its poverty reduction strategy paper had been to halve poverty by 2015, and without such public and private partnerships, there would be no chance of achieving it. IFAD and the United Nations system played a major role in rural development in his country.

25. **Mr. Harcharik** (Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) said that FAO supported the implementation of the convention on Desertification. It recommended a comprehensive approach to that difficult problem, starting with better land management. As for the digital divide, a number of initiatives were under way, including those being taken by the Chief Executives Board.

26. **Mr. Jury** (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that the digital divide was an example of the need for a system-wide approach. The Chief Executives Board had been looking at the question, with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) taking the lead. Markets must be made to work for the rural poor; for example, a dramatic effect could be produced in the market when local farmers received current pricing information for their crops.

27. The key to the effectiveness of the PRSP and UNDAF was the level of commitment from the national Government. Sierra Leone was one example of a Government committed to a national food security policy as an important element of its transition from conflict to reconstruction. The system was only as good as the national priority given to an issue. When a Government really emphasized a particular item, results were visible. The United Nations system could not impose priorities, however.

28. **Mr. Malloch Brown** (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said that care must be taken to ensure that capacity-building was fully integrated into the system, and accompanied by investment. The Rome-based agencies, WFP and FAO, were field-based, and there was no substitute for their country-level participation in the drafting of PRSPs, as many of the decisions involved in setting priorities must be made on the ground.

29. In his view, 2005 would be the most critical year in the process of reaching the Millennium Development Goals. The Council could play an important role in the process by providing policy guidance at the international level. Strategies were best designed at the local level, however, closer to where the choices must be made.

30. **Ms. Weill-Halle** (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)), Rapporteur, summarizing the key points of the discussion, said that political will of Governments and a sustained commitment to the priorities established were the key requirements for rural development. Many participants had called for adequate resources for rural development and for agriculture as a key economic sector. Off-farm rural employment, local market access, private sector development and capacity-building were other important issues mentioned in the discussion, along with the importance of coordination, which cut across many issues.

31. Many speakers had also stressed the importance of South-South cooperation and sharing of knowledge between developing countries. The commitment by the Group of Eight to agricultural productivity would require field-level coordination, which was emphasized in the UNDAF and PRSP process.

32. The role of the Council in the 2005 review of progress towards implementation of the Millennium Declaration, along with the roles of the High Level Committee on Programmes and the Chief Executives Board in reviewing the rural development agenda, had also been emphasized. The main conclusion drawn was that no rural development programme could succeed without country ownership of the process. The United Nations could provide advice and funding, but the country itself must take the lead.

(b) Coordinated and integrated United Nations system approach to promoting rural development in developing countries, with due consideration to least developed countries, for poverty eradication and sustainable development (*continued*)

33. **The President** invited the Council to resume its general discussion of the agenda item.

34. **Mr. Oratmangun** (Indonesia) said that for most developing countries, regardless of their capacity and stage of development, rural development and poverty eradication would continue to form an integral part of their development strategies. However, in an interdependent and globalizing economy, national efforts alone would be insufficient without an enabling environment at the international level. International support was therefore crucial, given the complex challenges those countries faced. At the domestic level, limited financial resources and a lack of institutional capacity hampered efforts to achieve integrated rural development. High volatility of commodity prices, limited access to markets in developed countries,

external debt and ODA fluctuations were obstacles on the international level that impacted those efforts. There had been some encouraging initiatives by the United Nations and other international organizations to promote rural development. However, in the view of his delegation, the report of the Secretary-General (E/2004/58) placed more emphasis on institutional aspects related to coordination mechanisms than on an assessment of the real impact of those institutions on rural development and poverty eradication at the country level. For example, the report highlighted the increase in World Bank lending for rural development, but did not adequately address the challenges that developing countries faced in implementing a PRSP as part of that process.

35. Given the critical importance of infrastructure in rural development, his delegation supported several innovations being explored jointly by IFAD, FAO and WFP to increase the amount of funding available for rural development. One such mechanism being implemented on a bilateral level was debt cancellation in return for a commitment by the borrower to allocate those resources to rural development and food security. Microcredit, microfinance and cooperative ventures were other effective programmes which increased the economic welfare of rural households and raised productivity. South-South cooperation also had major strategic importance.

36. Any effort to strengthen a coordinated and integrated system-wide approach to rural development should be directed at building consensus on problems and practical ways of promoting rural development. However, it was equally important to encourage international organizations to be more sensitive to the need of developing countries to pursue their own priorities.

37. **Mr. Lovald** (Observer for Norway) said that, despite all efforts the number of hungry in the world was increasing, indicating that many sectors, including production, health, education, infrastructure and management of natural resources and the environment, were not functioning satisfactorily. For those reasons, Norway welcomed the effort to promote an integrated approach to rural development. Its own Action Plan for Agriculture in Development Policy also adopted an integrated approach. Improvements in living conditions laid the groundwork for more democracy, and resulted in better safeguards for vulnerable groups, including women. Rural development was a way of promoting human rights and security.

38. His delegation welcomed the emphasis in the Secretary-General's report on increased productivity in connection with sustainable management of natural resources, protection of biodiversity and rural development, as well as the emphasis on agricultural education and research and the move to orient it more towards poverty reduction, the private sector and entrepreneurship. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research mobilized cutting-edge scientific research in the fight against poverty. Given the increasing privatization of agricultural tools, processes and products, United Nations Member States must fund research organizations that made the results of their research available to all.

39. Experience had shown that support to rural development yielded results only when it was given sufficient priority in national policies. One of his Government's objectives in its agricultural plan of action was to ensure that multilateral organizations adapted their activities to the strategies and priorities of a recipient country and coordinated with other donors.

40. **Ms. Spirnak** (United States of America) said that major donors and financial institutions had recognized that increased agricultural productivity was essential to promote rural development, and had updated their strategies accordingly. Her delegation applauded the focus of the African Union on agricultural productivity and rural development through its leaders' pledge to allocate 10 per cent of national budgets to increase agricultural production. The Group of Eight had also made a commitment to end the cycle of famine in the Horn of Africa by working closely with WFP, FAO and other United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations to continue to improve global emergency assessment and agricultural information systems.

41. No one agency could address all the issues involved in rural development in their entirety, and thus the increased collaboration among the Rome-based agencies was welcome, as was the support for NEPAD from the United Nations system. Her delegation commended FAO for its report "State of Food and Agriculture 2003-2004", which explored the potential for agricultural biotechnology to address the needs of the world's poor and those who lacked food

security. The report concluded that biotechnology should form part of an integrated and comprehensive agricultural research and development programme that gave priority to the problems of the poor. The public sector should be encouraged to direct more resources to agricultural research, including biotechnology, and capacity-building for research and regulatory issues related to biotechnology should be a priority for the international community.

42. **Mr. Rosenthal** (Guatemala), associating himself with the views of the Group of 77 and China, observed that in the United Nations there were several bodies dedicated to rural development, which could lead to fragmented policies. However, all parts of the system had the potential to work well together and rural development was a topic that lent itself to promoting coordination, cooperation and coherence. He was therefore pleased at the active participation in the preparation and execution of the high-level segment. For most LDCs, rural development was the path to development, and his Government therefore fully supported the draft resolution that had been negotiated over the past few days.

43. From the Guatemalan perspective, rural development was one of the highest priorities in the Total Agreement on Firm and Lasting Peace Ending the Internal Armed Conflict, signed in December 1996, and of the new administration that had taken office in January 2004. The United Nations had provided support for concrete initiatives such as land tenure schemes and infrastructure; the United Nations Development Programme had sponsored a panel for promoting dialogue on rural development. The goals of cooperation, coordination and coherence were common to the United Nations system and his Government, and he looked forward to concrete results from both parties.

44. **Mr. Ayari** (Tunisia) said that rural and agricultural development were especially important in developing countries, including LDCs. While all countries must give highest priority to such development, it was also necessary to strengthen partnerships at all levels in order to achieve the desired results. His Government therefore favoured greater inclusion of rural development in the operational and development policy aspects of the United Nations, the specialized agencies and the World Bank.

45. He stressed the importance of access to financing, particularly microcredit and microfinancing as the means to lift rural populations out of poverty. He was disturbed by the decline in financing and investment in agriculture. The number of hungry and malnourished people continued to increase; most lived in rural areas, particularly in LDCs. He also wished to call the Council's attention to the digital divide. One billion of the world's rural poor lived on less than one dollar a day and could not benefit from global information systems. The World Summit on the Information Society, the second phase of which would take place in Tunis in 2005, must urgently respond to the needs of the rural poor.

46. International assistance to LDCs must increase significantly and, in Africa, could be channelled through NEPAD, which gave priority to rural development. South-South cooperation was also important, particularly in the area of water resources. Control of water by the poor was essential for full exploitation of agricultural land. The World Bank's first Water Week, held from 1 to 3 July 2004, would pay particular attention to rural Africa.

47. Tunisia had always considered rural development and promotion of agriculture to be of special importance. The qualitative evolution of its agriculture had guaranteed food security, and its ability to satisfy water needs had contributed to improved commerce.

48. **Mr. Sharma** (Nepal) said that malnutrition, disease and lack of education were stifling development. The international community must do more to protect the environment, which was being depleted by populations struggling to get by with scant resources. In Nepal, a high percentage of the population lived in rural areas; most lived below the poverty line. The United Nations had contributed to rural development and poverty eradication; it had been responsible for a number of compacts, including the Millennium Development Goals, and had considerable investment resources at its disposal. Unfortunately, its efforts had been inconsistent, and rural development efforts had not produced the results expected, which had undermined the Organization's credibility.

49. **Mr. Doryan** (World Bank) said that halving poverty in a sustainable manner by 2015 would be impossible without focusing attention on rural areas, and developing countries had therefore increasingly included rural development in their comprehensive strategy to overcome poverty.

50. The World Bank had increased its rural lending by over 55 per cent over the last two years, and the number of its projects with a rural component had increased by more than one third. It had been recognized that fragmentation would not achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and the bilateral development and Rome-based agencies had come a long way in increasing the wide range of activities involving cooperation and coordination. The Global Platform for Rural Development was an excellent example of such cooperation.

51. Increasing agricultural productivity was critical to increasing farm incomes, but scientific research directed at agriculture in the developing world was decreasing. The World Bank was therefore committed to the Agriculture Science and Technology Assessment; which was one of the keys to unlocking agricultural productivity. It had also long been a supporter of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, which sponsored programmes that used science to fight poverty, such as the breeding of high-yield crops and crops with enhanced mineral and micronutrient densities.

52. Rural development was a good example of coordination of the policies and activities among the United Nations family. Demand for such coordination was increasing, particularly in LDCs, and it was therefore time for the international community to deliver better results, deeper coordination and advanced forms of harmonization.

53. **Mr. Bassani** (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that, following the Brussels Programme of Action, WHO had developed a framework for action to promote health in LDCs. The seven key elements included mobilization of additional resources for health priorities; efficient management and channelling of funds; strategic partnerships between public and private organizations for the production and distribution of global public goods; effective health systems developed under sound government and coordinated with donor and community support; ways of measuring progress against targets; more advocacy, social mobilization and public awareness campaigns; and policy coherence across all health-related sectors.

54. In LDCs, the majority of the poor lived in rural areas where facilities were rare and the burden of disease was greater. Therefore, more specific targeted actions were needed to improve the health of the poor in rural areas. WHO was focusing on the development of district health management systems and the decentralization of health services and strengthened coordination at the district level of health, education, environment and other sectors.

55. The challenge remained to address the causal links between poor health and poverty, and the agenda of achieving the Millennium Development Goals would contribute to addressing those challenges and helping LDCs to progress out of poverty.

56. **Ms. Bernabes** (Oasis Open City Foundation) said that the Brasilia Declaration had been the result of the kind of collaboration referred to at the current meeting. Above all, it had been made possible by the participation of small, isolated rural municipalities of the type that could benefit the most from decisions taken at the meeting. Their participation in the Declaration was their way of making their voices heard. Rural issues could not be separated from urban issues. Optimal strategies for sustainable development therefore depended on harmonious coexistence of urban and rural populations, and the great challenge was to give equal attention to the rural sector. The Declaration had given rise to some successful initiatives, including education in sustainable citizenship, beginning at the kindergarten level, and using monitoring indicators, such as benchmarks, self-evaluation and certification of competence, to help municipal authorities to reach their development goals. Such measures would promote development and quality of life in peripheral or under-developed areas.

57. **Mr. Civili** (Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Department of Economic and Social Affairs) expressed his thanks to the participants in the meeting. He had been impressed by the quality and level of the statements, as well as by the remarkable convergence across groups and regions. He was pleased at the positive reaction to the Secretary-General's report, and confirmed that the Secretariat would consider the recommendations made during the debate and the interactive session.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.